

CHAPTER IV

EAR-BORING

881 THE first great event in a Burmese girl's life is the nā-twin
304 mingala, the boring of her ears. She is not out of the doll
stage till that happens. She may have toddled after her
mother to the market with a basket of fruit on her head,
long before the ear-boring, but that ceremony is as much an
epoch to her as putting on the yellow robe, or getting his
legs tattooed, is to her brother. Ever afterwards she will
look upon every male as a possible lover. No more taking
alternate whiffs at a big green cheroot with little Maung
Po; no more teasing Po Shan to let her have a taste of
those fine nettè mangoes his father has got down from
Mandalay; no more dawdling about the streets by herself,
watching the small boys playing with the round gôn nyin
seeds, or having a hurried glimpse of the puppet play, while
she is supposed to be at home looking after the house with
her little brother. When she walks out now it will be with
her mother, or an aunt, or married sister, as a chaperone;
and if she goes to the play it will be in formal procession,
and with all her finest clothes on. Nothing like getting the
ears bored to set a girl thinking about the wave of the hair
that falls down in lappets by her ears, or the best recipe for
the fragrant straw-coloured thanaka, with which she tints
her face and charms half the senses of the gallants. It even
alters her walk. She sets about practising the coquettish sway
of the body in walking, which is considered so attractive, and
which a philosophical matter-of-fact Darwinian would prob-
ably declare was first of all due to an involuntary throwing
out of the heel with each step to keep the folds of the dress

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

modestly closed in front, and to prevent the dainty slipper, just covering her toes and no more, from slipping off the foot. However that may be, it is an accomplishment indispensable to a Burmese belle. She takes as much pains over it as she does with her jetty tresses. In a word, the nā-twin mingala transforms the girl into a woman, just as much as admission to a monastery makes the boy a man. It is her baptism, and is the distinctive mark of her race. Most of the men get their ears bored too, but the ceremony is not so solemn with them, and latterly is not so universal, at any rate not in the towns on the coast.

The ceremony takes place at the age of twelve or thirteen, just when the girl has attained puberty in fact. Her sadā is submitted to a soothsayer, that a fortunate day and hour may be chosen, and that being fixed, a great feast is prepared, and all the friends of the family and the relations are invited. An invitation to an ear-boring feast is a very urgent matter. No one can refuse without a very good excuse, and serious business is often postponed to the demands of such a ceremony. Everybody comes early, and sits down in any place he can find round about the front part and sides of the room, the girl, with all her female relatives about her, reclining on a mat at the back. The bedin sayā stalks about gazing at a mysterious strip of palm-leaf, or apparently wrapped in deep thought. Beside him is the professional ear-borer. He carries the needles, which are almost always pure gold, and even in the case of the poorest, never of any baser metal than silver. Rich people very often have them set at the ends with precious stones. At last the soothsayer gives the sign that the favourable moment has arrived. The ear-borer moves up immediately and passes the needles through the lobe of the ear, sometimes using a cork as they do in England, but more often letting them pass between two of his fingers. The girl, who has been worked up into a high state of excitement and terror by all the preparations, usually struggles and shrieks as hard as she can, but the women round about hold her down, and the band of music in the street outside strikes up a rapid movement and drowns her lamentations, while all the visitors burst into a flood of talk

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